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Report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Managing for results in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2004/5)

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Managing for results in the United Nations system", for the consideration of the General Assembly.

Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Managing for results in the United Nations system" consists of three parts, namely, part I — Implementation of results-based management in the United Nations Organization (JIU/REP/2004/6 (see A/59/607)), part II — Delegation of authority and accountability (JIU/REP/2004/7 (see A/59/631)) and part III — Managing performance and contracts (JIU/REP/2004/8 (see A/59/632)). An overview document (JIU/REP/2004/5 (see A/59/617)) summarizes the overall findings and recommendations of the report and are articulated in a "benchmark framework".

Members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) find the report of the Joint Inspection Unit in its entirety to be a useful and valuable reference from a system-wide perspective on the subject of results-based management. They are in broad agreement with the findings and conclusions of the report. CEB members, however, are of the view that the two main recommendations of the report should be considered in the light of the specific situations and requirements of the organizations of the system, as well as in relation to the inter-agency mechanisms already in place within the framework of CEB. While agreeing, in principle, on the practical benefits of utilizing the benchmarks suggested in the report by which performance and efficiency may be judged, most

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CEB members observe that each organization of the system would need to adapt the proposed benchmarks to its particular circumstances, programmes and outputs before they could be applied.

I. Introduction

1. The three-part Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "Managing for results in the United Nations system" presents a comprehensive analysis of planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, delegation of authority and accountability, staff performance management and management of contractual arrangements in the organizations of the United Nations system. These processes are defined in the report as the main pillars for the development of results-based management systems.

2. The report contends that while the United Nations system as a whole has launched wide-ranging initiatives to establish results-based management systems, the outcomes have been uneven, some organizations having been more successful than others. However, across the entire system, the changeover to results-based management has been largely lengthy and difficult.

3. As it is considered too early to evaluate the impact of the introduction of results-based management, the Joint Inspection Unit report offers instead a list of critical success factors, or benchmarks, to measure progress towards results-based management. The report also highlights good practices in relevant areas. These are intended to contribute to the system-wide efforts of the United Nations system in successfully developing results-based management systems.

II. General comments

4. Members of CEB find this series of Joint Inspection Unit reports to be a useful comprehensive analysis of the different environments under which results-based management approaches are evolving, reflecting the differences among the management structures, resources, policies, programmes and activities of the organizations of the United Nations system. While the results-based management benchmarks articulated in the report represent highly desirable situations and management ideals, the reality is such that not all of these benchmarks can be completely or easily realized by all segments of the United Nations system.

5. CEB members appreciate, in particular, the research and in-depth analysis contained in parts I, II and III of the report, which deal with the identification of suitable success criteria. Part I contains nine benchmarks for implementation of results-based management in the United Nations system organizations. Part II contains a total of 16 benchmarks, eight each for delegation of authority and accountability, respectively, in relation to human resources management. Part III contains eight benchmarks for implementing a successful performance management programme, six benchmarks for rewarding of performance and five benchmarks for an effective contractual arrangement.

6. CEB members note that the experience thus far with the implementation of results-based management was presented to the General Assembly in an interim report of the Secretary-General on implementation of results-based budgeting for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/57/478). That report highlighted, among other things, the fact that there were no additional start-up budgets for the introduction of results-based management and that extrabudgetary resources had to be provided for staff training. CEB members also note that a process of "learning-by-doing" was followed, particularly in the absence of resources needed to introduce results-based management principles in planning and programming practices system-wide. CEB members are therefore not in agreement with the report's finding in its introductory paragraphs that development of results-based management in the system has been perceived as suffering from a slow pace of implementation and that it lacks a "coherent, holistic approach" (JIU/REP/2004/6, para. 18). CEB members observe that these remarks are not well-founded, considering that results-based management concepts were introduced step-by-step, not only in view of resource constraints but also because it involved the gradual shift to new ways of doing things in a manner that would preclude total paralysis of United Nations system operations, bearing in mind that the legislative processes in approving new initiatives are not always synchronized. Moreover, CEB members emphasize that in the process of gradually introducing results-based management concepts, management initiatives are taken in a piecemeal fashion at different points in time.

7. As regards the proposed benchmark on delegation of authority in the context of human resources management, CEB members point out that certain risks are inherent in delegation of authority concerning the implementation of corporate policies, such as on geographical distribution, gender balance, or spouse employment, among others. Experience has shown that decisions on these matters seem to be better handled at the higher-management level.

8. On the proposed benchmark concerning managerial competencies, CEB members note that, in the case of the United Nations Secretariat in recent years, core values and competencies have been progressively integrated into all human resources policies and practices, such as in generic job descriptions, recruitment and selection guidelines, staff development and performance management.

9. On the proposed benchmark concerning accountability, CEB members point out that the legal framework for accountability that supports results-based management is already being integrated into the ongoing process of implementing results-based management. Policy decisions to shift towards results-based management have already been made and results-based management is now a "work in progress" in most if not all organizations of the system. At each step in the process, care is taken to introduce appropriate revisions to the legal framework, including those elements dealing with accountability.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

Legislative organs of participating organizations may wish to endorse this benchmarking framework as a tool for them, the pertinent oversight bodies and the secretariats to measure the progress towards an effective implementation of

results-based management in their respective organizations, taking into account their specificities, and may wish to request their secretariats to present to them a report thereon.

10. CEB members are in broad agreement that the proposed benchmarks represent ideal situations that should guide and provide direction to management in the development of results-based management systems. However, they are of the view that there is no compelling need at this juncture for the proposed benchmarking framework to be endorsed by the legislative organs of the organizations of the system inasmuch as the proposed benchmarks (as well as other, quite similar success criteria) are already embodied, albeit to a differing extent and scope, in operational programme and management guidelines, particularly in the organizations that have so far successfully applied results-based management approaches. For example, in the United Nations Secretariat and in some of the specialized agencies' budget instructions, instructions for the formulation of the strategic framework (which has replaced the medium-term plan), instructions for the preparation of programme performance reports, and the conduct of evaluation all provide guidance on application of results-based management concepts.

11. Members of CEB observe that, in general, the proposed benchmarks are complementary to the various success criteria already adopted by the United Nations and its funds and programmes and by a number of the other organizations of the system since the introduction of results-based budgeting in 1997 as part of the Secretary-General's reform proposals for the United Nations system.

12. CEB members also note that the progress of management reforms in the organizations of the system is routinely reported to governing bodies and further reporting against these benchmarks would thus be merely duplicative.

Recommendation 2

The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, building on existing efforts within the system, should play a more active role in harmonizing, to the extent possible, the implementation of results-based management in the United Nations system organizations and provide a forum for the exchange of experiences among the United Nations organizations in this regard. CEB could consider establishing a task force for this purpose.

13. CEB members believe that the existing inter-agency mechanisms and processes in the framework of the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management provide more than adequate forums for the exchange of views and experience concerning harmonization of the implementation of results-based management approaches system-wide. However, CEB members also agree that, as mentioned in paragraph 38 of part II of the report, the United Nations System Staff College could have a positive role to play, particularly in strengthening system-wide human resources development to support results-based management.

14. While results-based management approaches are indeed being developed across the organizations of the system, CEB members point out that a number of factors give rise to different stages of implementation, including, for example, the required legislative decision-making processes, the nature of the work of the

organization, the rate of implementation of different management initiatives and the level of resources available for moving such initiatives forward. Therefore, while harmonization of efforts among organizations of the system is highly desirable, it would not be necessary, nor should it be expected, that all the phases in the development of results-based management processes should be at the same stage of implementation system-wide. Nor would it be necessary to implement all elements of the proposed benchmarks for successful implementation of results-based management in the organizations of the system.